

CONNECTIONS



Maximizing Our Impact in Greater Nebraska

When it's time to plot a course to achieving your hometown's dreams, it can help to step off the community-building treadmill for a moment and smell the roses.

For Kent Clymer and Butler County Area Foundation Fund, Nebraska Community Foundation's Impact Planning process cast their community in a new light, illuminating new approaches to boost their ability to create meaningful progress.

"That was really helpful," Clymer said. "The thing that stood out was impactful grantmaking. It's a totally different mindset."

That perspective shift inspired BCAFF to award \$100,000 to the Bone Creek Museum of Agrarian Art, to be paid out in \$20,000 installments over five years. The grant will help as museum leadership strives to achieve its goal of relocating to a space with increased capacity. Pledging multi-year support also demonstrates a Fund's trust in the organization and confidence in its ability to succeed. Unrestricted funding over time is essential for creating healthy, adaptive, and effective organizations.

"You develop partnerships with various groups for multi-year grantmaking so bigger projects can happen," Clymer said. "That was an eye-opening discussion for us. When grantees know they're going to have income it just starts to snowball. It gives us stability and lets them make a plan."

Impact Planning is a significant step in an NCF affiliated fund's growth and serves as an investigation of a



Impact Planning is helping communities like Keith County, which hosted a Big Give event in June, achieve a margin of excellence.

community from every angle. Essential to the entire process is open, authentic discussion among FAC members about what they feel is the best path forward for their community.

"This isn't something you sit down and do on a Saturday afternoon or in one evening," Clymer said. "There are several phases to this thing, and it takes honest discussion about what you want the future to be. Sometimes everybody's idea of the perfect future isn't necessarily the same thing."

By completing Impact Planning, funds gain a new strategic framework, new goals, a deeper understanding of transformational grantmaking, and new resources. Funds also receive a shareable "community snapshot" that lifts up pertinent data that empowers leaders to better understand their community's unique challenges, strengths, and needs.

"The snapshot has all this vital information, everything potential businesses or people who may potentially move to the community want to know, all in one spot," Clymer said. "It's really handy to be able to grab that. It answers so many questions."

Butler County is among seven affiliated funds that have completed Impact Planning, joining Nebraska City, Imperial, Perkins County, McCook, Pender, and Columbus. Keith County is currently going through the process. Each fund developed goals and major takeaways that will inform future efforts.

"One of the key points of Impact Planning is to encourage the local committees to really dig in to know their places deeply," said K.C. Belitz, NCF's Chief Operating Officer. "This allows them to be more insightful and proactive in grantmaking to make the most impact in their place." ■

Connecting with Your Fellow Nebraskans



Jeff Yost, NCF
President and CEO

The Nebraska Community Foundation network of affiliated funds is its own unique version of the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon . . . only in Nebraska, it's

more like two. Each fund is connected to the next with varying degrees of proximity, but without question, it wouldn't take long for you to identify the relationships, opportunities, and circumstances that connect us all.

It's a fun exercise we've been playing ever since we announced the theme of NCF's 2022 Annual Celebration and Training. *Connect*. It's simple but perhaps one of the best words in the English language to describe what the NCF network offers the 1,500 volunteers, 270 communities, and 250-plus affiliated funds that it includes. A retired superintendent in Lodgepole is inspired by the NCF affiliated fund in his hometown of Stuart so he rallies local volunteers to create their own. Boone County wants to build a state-of-the-art early childhood development center like the one they saw in Red Cloud. They in turn inspire Keith



Nebraska Community Foundation's Annual Celebration and Training is one of the best opportunities to connect with and learn from fellow volunteers.

County to establish their own Big Give event after seeing their fellow fund's success. And of course, an \$8 million anonymous estate gift in Keith County has inspired everyone in the network to get more intentional about their planned giving efforts.

Connection is one of the best parts about living in Nebraska. We increasingly hear stories about small communities opting for collaboration over competition and the brilliant things they are able to achieve as

a result. NCF's Annual Celebration and Training is perhaps the greatest opportunity we have for connection all year.

Please consider this your invitation to join us in La Vista this November and connect—to your dreams, to your neighbors, to your communities, and to your fellow ambitious Nebraskans across the state.

I sincerely hope to have the opportunity to connect with you soon. ■



2022
ANNUAL CELEBRATION
AND TRAINING

La Vista | November 17



Internships are an Invitation Home

Paige Kniep didn't know she wanted to return home until completing her NCF Hometown Internship in 2021—now she plans to build a life in Deshler. Kniep, who served as Deshler Community Fund's Hometown Intern in 2021, said the experience was among many factors that inspired her to make the choice to return to Thayer County after college and start a business in her hometown.

"I feel like this internship last summer really assured me that Deshler was the place I wanted to end up," Kniep said. "Having that one person in your hometown that encourages you makes a big difference. It really showed me that path was possible."

She's not the only one. Emily Morrow of O'Neill was recently hired as West Holt Medical Services' Marketing Director. Hayley Denner of Diller will begin a teaching and coaching job in St. Edward in the fall. Austin Truex will further deepen his Norfolk roots through a Lead for America fellowship—an AmeriCorps program aimed at revitalizing small towns. Numerous others are declaring their intentions to return to Greater



Hayley Denner of Diller and Dakota Cherney of Chester are both returners to the NCF Hometown Internship program this year.

Nebraska after college, some crediting their Hometown Internship as a major contributing factor in their decision.

The 2022 class of Hometown Interns is our largest yet with 23 students serving in paid internships in 16 communities throughout the state including Bennet, Diller, Wayne, Keith County, Cuming County, Hebron, Deshler, Columbus, McCook, Crofton, Norfolk, Butler County, Red Cloud, Chester, Howells, and Nemaha County. Of the 23, six are returning to the program for the second or even third time. Over the summer, interns will forge new connections and strengthen existing bonds as they work on a variety of community-building projects to better their hometowns. ■

Welcome to the Team!



Kacie Wise recently joined Nebraska Community Foundation as the Office and Gift Processing Assistant,

supporting NCF's mission through a variety of clerical and administrative roles. Wise received her Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from Doane University in 2016. Prior to joining NCF, she served in various roles at Nelnet followed by nearly six years at Concordia University-Nebraska as the sole financial aid coordinator.



Todd Mekelburg is thrilled to return to Nebraska as our new Director of Gift Planning. Mekelburg has worked in the

planned giving world for three decades during which he has learned the art of working with donors and structuring planned gifts that meet their goals. He completed a degree in business administration and accounting at Union College and most recently served as director of planned giving at Loma Linda University Health. ■

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Find a full list of our honorary members at www.nebcommfound.org/about/board-of-directors



NCF Board and Staff Tour the Sandhills

Nebraska Community Foundation affiliated funds in Valley County, Taylor, and Burwell rolled out the red carpet for NCF's staff and statewide board of directors during a quarterly meeting in June. Local volunteers from the Calamus Area Community Fund—whose service spans both Loup and Garfield counties—and Valley County Community Foundation Fund led community tours highlighting their work and the region's abundant assets.

Each fund has over \$2.4 million in assets, and they have collectively reinvested nearly \$5 million for community betterment.

AFFILIATED FUND UPDATES

The Roles of an NCF Affiliated Fund

On any given day, Fund Advisory Committees play a variety of roles. We first put a name to these roles at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, but these functions have always been (and will continue to be) important to community wellbeing.

Convener and Connector In many communities, funds bring together organizations to achieve shared goals that benefit every resident.

Leader Affiliated funds can be influential in their communities by taking visionary steps forward and empowering residents to chase their dreams.

Information and Resource Hub Many affiliated funds are the go-to source for information in their communities, whether they're sharing updates on local events or educating others on community-building knowhow.



Convener and Connector



Leader



Information and Resource Hub



Grantmaker



Fundraiser



Cheerleader and Champion

Grantmaker A significant role any FAC can play is grantmaker, particularly in identifying impactful grantees that fuel long-term transformation.

Fundraiser The other side of the grantmaking coin. Fundraising is a

powerful tool in the FAC toolkit, and essential to achieving our dreams.

Cheerleader and Champion Every community needs its bastion of active hope. Affiliated funds can be a powerful source of positivity and good news. ■



Columbus Area Future Fund recently granted \$20,000 to eight local projects as part of its “Welcoming and Belonging Community Grant Challenge.” Recipients included efforts to translate community information to Spanish for newcomers, a young professionals program, welcoming school programs, and much more. Overall, 18 projects submitted grant applications.

“We were absolutely blown away by the number of applications and interest in our Welcoming Community Grant Challenge,” said Columbus Area Future Fund Chair Dee Hanson, “Being a totally new type of grant process for our fund, and really for any fund throughout the region, we had no idea what to expect. The creative problem solving and passion for helping folks to feel like they belong in our community from all of the applicants was truly inspiring.” ■

Columbus Area Future Fund Advisory Committee members present a Welcoming and Belonging Grant to Columbus Public Schools.



Volunteers with Hickman Area Community Foundation Fund are working to build an accessible playground, with input from local children who will use the equipment.

Hickman Area Community Foundation Fund is the latest member of the NCF network working to build a playground where all kids—no matter their abilities—can play together. Fund members want to build a “sensory-rich environment that is also physically

and socially supportive for children of all abilities” at parks in the greater Hickman area. Local children selected all pieces of equipment for the project, based on their own needs. The Fund hopes to raise \$180,000 to make kids’ dreams a reality in Hickman. ■

Neligh Area Community Fund completed the Jim and Pat Blackburn Challenge Grant! The Fund raised more than \$200,000, earning \$100,000 for their unrestricted endowment. “Neligh is a great place to grow up and to return to raise future generations,” said FAC member Lauren Sheridan-Simonsen. “We are working on multiple projects to make Neligh an even more family-friendly community thanks to the incredible generosity of the Blackburn family.” ■



Eustis-Farnam students participate in Sod House Days by volunteering throughout the community.

Eustis Area Community Foundation Fund awarded grants to bring a community tradition back to life. Earlier this year, FAC member and local teacher Carly Rexing’s journalism students at Eustis-Farnam Schools chose to resurrect Sod House Day as their final project—a dormant celebration inspired by a sod house built by the community in 1999. For years, the community celebrated the achievement by learning about pioneer history. Rexing’s class brought it back, this time leading volunteer and community service activities throughout town. ■



NACF completed a challenge grant from Jim and Pat Blackburn (pictured), adding \$300,000 to their unrestricted endowment.



Members gather around a table for a Brave Girls club meeting, an after-school program that helps girls become more confident.

The Daycos4Good Donor-Advised Fund boosted a local program that helps girls become more confident and connected. The Fund awarded a grant to the Brave Girls, a club organized by an afterschool program known as The Zone. The Fund granted \$1,200 to the program earlier this year. “We are so grateful for the money that has been provided for this group,” said Alexis Huisman, The Zone’s executive director. “It has helped us continue to educate our youth on the importance of mental health-related topics and taking care of ourselves. We are helping our youth grow to have a positive impact on our community and our world.” ■

Join us in welcoming **Dodge Community Fund** to the NCF family! Success in neighboring communities inspired the town of just over 600 people to join the NCF network. Fund advisory committee members seek to build an unrestricted endowment while also building up community pride and involvement. ■



Kathy Heard from the Howells Community Fund joins Becky Stecher, NCF's Kara Weander-Gaster, Don Bayer, and NCF's Kara Asmus for a meeting of the recently formed Dodge Community Fund.

LEAVING A LEGACY

Kreutz Bennett Fund Leaves \$700,000 Impact



Last year, Arapahoe Public Library received funding for a major renovation allowing for a new community

room for children's programming and accessible parking, entry, and bathrooms. Plainview Public Library received a grant to purchase a laser cutter and etcher, allowing the library to host makerspace camps and further digital literacy in the area. The dedication of a passionate Nebraskan made both projects possible.

Shirley Kreutz Bennett's estate gift has helped dozens of Nebraska libraries (in communities with populations under 3,000) achieve a margin of excellence over the last 13 years. The Fund will spend the remainder of the gift's principal this year, marking over a decade of success.

In 2002, Kreutz Bennett stipulated in her trust that upon her death the remaining assets be used to create a term endowment with NCF held within a donor-advised fund. When she died late in 2009, an estate gift of about \$600,000 was used to establish the fund. Overall, the Kreutz Bennett Donor-Advised Fund has invested \$700,000 in community libraries throughout the state.

A life-long learner, Kreutz Bennett graduated from Harvard High School in 1941, earned a BA from the University of Washington, Seattle, plus an MA and PhD from Columbia University, New York. She was a retired Professor of Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

"Shirley focused on libraries because she did a lot of traveling and experiencing the world," said NCF's Kristine Gale. "She felt libraries were a way for rural Nebraskans to learn and encounter things they may not otherwise be able to experience."



Children enjoy after school activities at the Lied Pierce Library, which received a grant this year to purchase a laser cutter.

2021 and 2022 grants include:

- Lied Pierce Public Library plans to purchase a laser cutter, as well as design software.
- Butler Memorial Library in Cambridge will use its grant to update its children's programming area with a new furniture, acoustic panels, and flexible seating.
- Lied Randolph Public Library will add a musical playground to its outdoor reading garden.

"Shirley would feel amazing about the impact she made," Gale said. ■

Blezek Gift Continues Dedication to Greater Nebraska Leaders

Dr. Allen Blezek believed in cultivating homegrown Nebraska leaders, and he dedicated his life's work to that mission. He was the founding director of the NU Center for Leadership Development and founding director of the Nebraska Leadership Education/Action Development Program, better known as LEAD. Numerous Greater Nebraska leaders gained experience through participating in the program.

"Allen, a true educator, had sensed the need for leadership training long before it became recognized by our society," said Honorary NCF Board Member Lora Damme, a longtime friend of Blezek's and former LEAD fellow. "He, along with other visionaries like Frank Sibert, formulated the mission to instill high level leadership skills in Nebraska farmers, ranchers, and ag businesspeople."

Blezek played a role in every part of the program. He set the schedule and curriculum; engaged instructors; solicited and obtained major sources of funding; and, most importantly, accompanied LEAD fellows throughout all their sessions and travel seminars across the country.

He continued his passion for inspiring Nebraska leaders with an estate gift made to NCF in 2021 establishing the Allen G. and Kay L. Blezek Undergraduate Student Fund for International Travel and the Dr. Allen G. and Kay L. Blezek Endowment for Leadership Development. He also made a generous contribution to the NCF operating endowment.

Estate gifts like Blezek's are a wonderful way to give to the communities or causes nearest to your heart. You can leave a legacy in your hometown while still taking care of important people in your life. Visit nebcommfound.giftlegacy.com to learn more about the unique ways you can impact your community. ■

PHOTO FROM NEBRASKA EXTENSION



Dr. Allen Blezek (third from left) receives the Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award from the Nebraska Extension.

When We All Leave 5, Our Hometowns Thrive!

Over the next 10 years in Nebraska, more than \$100 billion will transfer from one generation to the next. There is always a transfer from generation to generation, as parents pass away and leave their estate to their children. But if the heirs no longer live where they grew up, that wealth may leave as well.

Imagine if just five percent of this abundance were given back to the places where it was made and accumulated. If it were endowed, think of the impact that kind of money could have on education, health, prosperity, and quality of life. Think of how it could contribute to a community's ability to attract quality talent and young families. Harnessing just a small percentage of the transfer of wealth could be a gamechanger for the future of our hometowns.

To this end, NCF launched the 5 to Thrive campaign. 5 to Thrive is a call to action—consider leaving just five percent of your assets to your favorite



Kiel VanderVeen of Nebraska City has made a planned gift to support growth and progress for the next generation, including his daughter, Sylvia.

Nebraska hometown or to Nebraska Community Foundation to benefit all of our communities.

Communities across the NCF network are mobilizing their own local 5 to Thrive campaigns. In McCook, area nonprofits have convened a philanthropy council focused on encouraging more planned giving for the future. Numerous funds

—like the one in Perkins County—have written columns for their newspapers about the importance of planned giving. In Nebraska City, making a planned gift is the expectation among FAC members. Help us spread the word about 5 to Thrive. Visit www.fivetothrivene.org to learn more and access an abundance of free planned giving resources. ■

Welsh Honored as a Champion for Planned Giving



NCF Gift Planning Advisor Jim Gustafson nominated Ray Welsh (left) of Pender for the Community Sower Award.

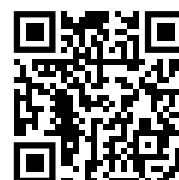
Honorary NCF board member Ray Welsh has undoubtedly left his fingerprint on his hometown of Pender. In June, The Charitable Gift Planners of Nebraska honored Welsh for his nearly two decades of community-building work in northeast Nebraska and beyond with the 2021 Community Sower Award. The award recognizes Nebraska professional advisors for outstanding efforts in

engaging clients in philanthropy and personal involvement in philanthropy. Judges assess candidates' impact on quantity and quality of charitable gifts, experience, and peer relationships.

As a champion for his hometown, Welsh's charisma and knowledge has allowed him to help many clients, friends, neighbors, family, and former residents of Pender to make current and future gifts to benefit their hometown. Welsh's influence has been instrumental in helping 100 percent of the members of the Pender-Thurston Education & Community Foundation Fund Advisory Committee to make planned gifts to benefit the Fund. There are 17 known planned gifts conservatively valued at almost \$1 million for the benefit of





Pender, a dynamic community of about 1,000 people.

"I think we should all think about what we want our fingerprint to be," Welsh said. "We're going to leave one regardless. What do we want our fingerprint to be 20 to 30 years from now when the people who are currently in charge of the community look back? What are we going to do to make their lives and things better for them down the road? What do we want our fingerprint to be?" ■



Watch a brief and powerful video on the transfer of wealth and 5 to Thrive campaign!

BE SOCIAL, SHARE!

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

BACK TO OUR HOMETOWNS

NCF reserves the back page of our newsletter to share stories and insights from NCF volunteers who are making a home in Greater Nebraska.



Karina Perez has made an impact and a home in Columbus with her husband, Aaron, and their three children.

Karina Perez has served as the Executive Director of Centro Hispano since 2017. Located in Columbus, Centro works to serve immigrant families, learners, and entrepreneurs in rural Nebraska through a variety of programming and services. Centro is just one of the ways Columbus aims to be more welcoming and inviting to new Americans looking to make their home in Greater Nebraska. It's a cause that's near and dear to Perez. Her parents left El Salvador decades ago seeking

new opportunities in California. After having children, their priorities shifted, and the good life came calling. A family connection brought them to Columbus where Perez has spent most of her life.

Perez loves Columbus but she didn't always envision a future there. "It wasn't where I thought I would find opportunities," she said.

She moved to Omaha to pursue higher education but soon she "felt really distant and disconnected. I did have friends but as I started to think about my future it was not the same outlook I thought the city could provide."

Today, Perez's roots in the Columbus community run deep. Both she and her husband Aaron, a firefighter, and their three children enjoy having tons of extended family close by. Perez is particularly proud of and grateful for the collaborative spirit and acceptance of change and new ideas that exist in

her community. "You don't want to live in a community that's not advancing."

Perez brings invaluable perspective to the NCF statewide board of directors. "How do we get the NCF network to be more representative of what Nebraska really looks like? Young people, diversification of income, families of color, and more women in leadership."

Perez says becoming more diverse only stands to benefit the network. "What excites me about newcomers is all of the potential. We are creating innovation here."

But she says there are a lot of persistent misconceptions about newcomers and the clients Centro serves. "All of our newcomers are very similar in the sense that they come in looking to make a home," she said. "They are more than willing to give back to their communities with time, talent, and treasure." ■